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ABSTRACT

Metaphysics is a necessary point of departure to build a comprehensive understanding of the nature of adult and adulthood at a deeper philosophical level. A group of philosophers representing the school of German Classical Idealism remain highly influential in building elaborate arguments on the nature of self and reality that may assist adult educators in better understanding adult learning, development, and transformation. The question of being dwells in the closest proximity with adult education. First, there is a sense of "enduring self" inherent in one's nature. Second, the sense of self is directly available to one on the basis of modal-ontological status of subjectivity. Perspectives that validate this modal-ontological status seem to emphasize the general orientation of the world (at the levels of obvious and "hidden" realities) toward a unity, or "wholeness"; and self seems to follow the same path to strive for the unity of its vacillating states. Given that a sense of "enduring self" exists, the nature of adult can be understood as "the whole person," and the nature of adult education can be looked at as an expression of the whole life of an adult person. (Contains 10 references.) (YLB)

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Abstract: This paper intends to demonstrate the importance of metaphysical arguments for interpretations of the nature of adult and adult education and to connect these arguments with current theories of adult learning, development and transformation. Broadly conceived, this research represents theorizing from the literature that may shed an additional light on the problems of personal identity in the context of adult education.

Background and Rationale

"Who am I" seems to have an ontological priority over all other questions for adult education. "*Adult* and *adulthood* form a pivotal axis upon which adult education revolves as a field of both study and practice" (Boucouvalas, Krupp, 1989, p. 183). This research invites the readers to look at adult education in the light of discernment into matters personal and political, public and private, symbolic and artistic, conventional and transcendental. These matters, in my mind, are essentially interrelated and, even if not all of them are equally recognized as being "real" or "practical" to meet our immediate needs, they ought to be taken into account seriously.

Most often, adult educators deal with the matters of what is obvious, that is, the matters of the so-called "objective" reality. If a problem arises in a certain area of the world of our everyday affairs, adult educators are at their best to provide services as to how to solve a problem, to change a state of affairs, to improve, or to mend a situation. Without a doubt, this has always been a highly respectable service. Yet, on the other hand, adult educators seem to overlook the sphere of what cannot be quite obvious in the world of our affairs. I would like to invite the reader to look at the world at large, including the world of education, as being both "physical" and "metaphysical." I would like to focus on what is not obvious, but has always been there—the sphere of awareness, or consciousness. Although a mystery in itself, it is clearly part of our reality, and as such it cannot be ignored.

In the past few decades, there seems to persist an on-going interest in the matters of metaphysical character in the field of adult education. The word "metaphysics," however, is rarely used, yet implied. The history of traditional metaphysics can hardly be ignored if we are to inquire into the nature of adult and adulthood at a deeper philosophical level. Certain thinkers of the past and present remain highly influential in building elaborate arguments on the nature of self and reality that may assist adult educators in their attempt to better understand who or what an adult learner is, what motivates one to learn, whether or how an adult person develops, or what the nature of transformation is. The thinkers I refer to are a group of philosophers, known to the world as representatives of the school of German Classical Idealism. In the following sections, I will attempt to present the arguments of some idealist thinkers and to connect them with current theories of adult

learning, development, and transformation, explicated in the works of Brookfield, Candy, Erickson, Kegan, Knowles, Knox, Kohlberg, Merriam, Mezirow, and other contemporary adult educators.

Limitations of the Research

While rational, argumentative discourse remains central to adult education research and practice, the dimensions of faith, intuition, and mystical insight are largely seen as peripheral, "soft" and less valid discourses in which one may address the questions of personal identity. Such discourses can be limitative in themselves. Both metaphysical and mystical arguments confront the limitation of an ordinary language to convey the meaning of the concepts transcending a representational mode of knowing. In terms of the criteria for selection, this study limits itself by a number of choices. An attention is given to the authors who are recognized authorities in their respective fields, who are acclaimed by an international community of scholars, and whose works are widely read and accessible to a general public.

In particular, this study introduces the arguments on the nature of self developed by German idealist thinkers—Kant (1724-1804), Fichte (1762-1814), Schelling (1775-1854), Hölderlin (1770-1843), Novalis (1772-1801), Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Hegel (1771-1831), and Schopenhauer (1788-1860), existential-phenomenological arguments developed by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and supportive arguments on the nature of self and reality found in the world esoteric philosophies and new developments in the 20th century physics. This study attempts to connect "faith, reason, intuition, observation, and language" (Creswell, 1998, p. 140).

At the conceptual level, this paper underlies the limitations of the doctrine of scientific materialism, upon which many theories in adult education are built. Scientific materialism faces two basic limitations. First, in itself it represents a theory that transcends the ontology of the natural world and leaves behind the language of the subject, and in general every form of orientation in which the perspective of the first person comes in. Secondly, the theory of the material universe takes as its point of departure the fact that there is material reality in the first place. It can only point to the functions that determine the relations between material events, but cannot theorize about the initial state of all processes. Physical theory does not lead to an insight into some ultimate reality that is intelligible on its own and that fails only when faced with the integration of conscious life into its conceptual apparatus.

While recognizing the validity of scientific materialism, this paper points to its limitative discourse and suggests that adult education can benefit substantially if metaphysical arguments are included in its conceptual apparatus. Given the conditions of general orientation of the filed of adult education toward a subject ("adult"), metaphysics seems to be a necessary point of departure to build a comprehensive understanding of the nature of adult and adulthood.

Discussion

The question of being dwells in the closest proximity with adult education. In this paper, I raise the question of being for myself and for others. I argue, first, that there is a sense of "enduring self" inherent in our nature, and, second, that this sense is directly available to us on the basis of modal-ontological status of subjectivity. With regard to

metaphysics, self has a complex structure. We are, first, subjects in general, that is, beings that have as an essential property self-consciousness of our being. And we are, second, individuals, that is, unique and unmistakable subjects. Hence, there exists "the self," both as a general structure ("subjectivity") and as "my very own" ("individuality"). In saying "I," one applies two kinds of differentiation. First, one limits oneself against everything that does not have the character of an I, thus from the world (or the non-I). A second differentiation consists in the I's distinguishing itself from other beings that also have the mode of being of subjectivity. Through this second differentiation the I determines itself as individual or person ("empirical I," i.e., existing in "time and space") or the "*persona psychologica*" (Frank, 1997, p. 16).

Self-consciousness is directly related to our understanding of the meaning of reality. Whoever believes something at all about him- or herself, is related to him- or herself as something real. As a subject I know about myself as a person and I can address myself under this description. I am capable of self-ascription. This irreducible sense of personhood is available directly on the basis of the sense of subjectivity ("enduring self"). Self-ascription can be explained in terms of traditional logic that deals with certain a priori categories or necessary conditions of experience ("modality"). Modality refers to the classifications of propositions according to an assertion which is contained, rather than has a truth-value. One of such propositions is called "apodeictic," something asserted as necessary. Subjectivity thus is granted with modal-ontological status. Given this status, it follows that the knowledge I have of myself, insofar as I refer to myself, is in essence "real knowledge."

It was Immanuel Kant who founded his philosophy on the fundamental connection between the use of propositions that take the subject-predicate form and the possibility of self-consciousness. When we raise metaphysical question, we try to distinguish between appearance and reality. Kant argues that the distinction is merely empirical. The transcendental object ("thing-in-itself") remains unknown to us. The phenomena cannot exist in themselves but only in us. Unless we conceptualize objects, they remain mere appearance. Several elements are involved in the conceptualization of experience. One of them is an ability of self-consciousness of the one who owns it to bring intuitions under concepts. It follows that any representation would be *my* representation. Self-consciousness involves the necessary ownership of experience. Conceptualization of experience through one's conscious self is called "apperception" in Kant's philosophy. Apperception is necessarily transcendental apperception. The transcendental self represents the unity of apperception. The objective nature of the world thus depends on the transcendental unity of apperception (transcendental subject).

German philosophy since the Enlightenment has been widely described as a footnote to Kant. Kant's followers could neither think outside the framework of "transcendental idealism," nor discard his terminology. Central to German classical idealism is an understanding of the self as not only as the ground of all knowledge concerning the world, but also as the ground of the very reality of the world. The absoluteness of the self as the universal condition of reality was expressed by such constructs as "subject," "subject-object," or "spirit." Mental activity grounds universal structures of consciousness and allows individuals to be aware of themselves as subjects. This activity is viewed as self-generating—an original, reflexive awareness which makes possible the particular conscious states of individual subjects.

The recent revival of interest in German Idealism has been marked by the rejection of philosophies which entail a subject-object duality and a notion of cognition which depends upon assuming a mind separate from the rest of the world. German idealists raised the questions similar to the ones in contemporary adult education: What am I, by nature? What do I really want? And what is really motivating me? Kant approaches these questions with drawing between personal autonomy ("freedom") and the constrains inside and out ("nature") that keep us from overstepping moral boundaries of our actions. He finds a resolution in "practical reason"—our ability to act morally out of internal sense of obligation. Fichte's "pure I" exists absolutely, by virtue of self-positing (I=I), counterpositing (I=not-I), and simultaneous and mutual limitation between I and the not-I (Fichte's structure of the I). Fichte's self as pure "I" is equated with "immediate consciousness."

The absoluteness of "I" in Schelling's philosophy acquires a different dynamic. A subject's striving for unity (reconciliation between nature and freedom) is impossible unless Nature as "the other" is conceived as our true and deeper self. Self-intuition, which exists in nature prior to any particular self-consciousness, becomes "objective" in art or aesthetics, a fact that brings unity to the whole system and self. Novalis and Hölderlin continue to develop romantic conceptions of self and selfhood with their emphasis on the realm of art and beauty and its centrality in the definition of self—unrealized potential, alienated, tragic in its transience, yet capable of sublimations—brief glimpses of an absolute.

Schleiermacher and Hegel interpret personal identity in terms of "intersubjectivity"—participation of subjectivity in a community of minds. Self-consciousness of a subject is embedded in a particular context (socio-economic, religious, etc.) and is thus seen as mediated among other subjectivities. Schopenhauer sees a human subject essentially as "will." Will is not, however, the same as Fichtean pure "I." Will is manifest in me, trapped into a condition of individual existence, while the will in itself (our true nature) is timeless and eternal. The true purpose of life is the detachment from the will (individual striving to exist), which comes through art and aesthetic experience. In music, for instance, I hear not my will or your will, but the will detached from all individual striving. I hear what is purely ideal—the resolution of contending forces and the achievement of sublime consolation. I glimpse the absolute.

An underlying idea behind idealist interpretations of self is its transcendental and universal nature. Self (the subject of consciousness) is the ground of all that exists—unknowable to the understanding, but revealed to practical reason as freedom and will.

Existential Phenomenology offers a different interpretation of a human subject. Heidegger, for instance, firmly locates a human subject within the realm of worldly affairs (*Dasein*). Self is "being-in-the-world" (alongside "being-with-others" and "being-towards-death"). Mere being (*Sein*) does not exist as "thing-in-itself." The essence of Dasein is its *Existenz* (existence). "I" exists as a temporal transcendence without "necessary being" (God), who can remove the world's contingency. The question of being can be answered for us when we come to terms with our own contingency. We find a meaning in contingency itself. Our being becomes manifest through various modes, or "moods." *Angst* (anxiety) is the state of being in which I confront *my* question of being—my own contingency, and I alone am responsible to answer it. By overcoming anxiety (if I choose to do so), I can develop an attitude of "care" (*Sorge*)—being open to things and

caring for them. My authentic being (self) is "care," the unity of lived experiences, temporal transcendence, my involvement in the world. Care is a unifying and binding force within Dasein. On the one hand, there is *nothing* that survives *my* self, and in that I am conditioned by my contingency; on the other—I am totally free to choose to live authentically or otherwise, allowing my primordial being to be revealed. I may choose to make a leap of faith to reach Dasein, yet I may also fall. It all depends on me, on the mode of being I choose.

Esotericism offers an additional perspective to validate the modal-ontological status of subjectivity. Esotericism is also known as the science of ultimates, or mysticism. Self is seen in this tradition as grounded in and essentially of the same nature as the Ultimate Reality (known also as the One, the All, God, Absolute, Unity Consciousness, and some others)—ineffable, endless, and eternal transcendental reality. A human life is divine and purposeful. Its ultimate purpose is the union with the ultimate reality. Mystical interpretations of the nature of reality and self find support in the new physics of the 20th century. In their search for "the first principle," quantum theory and esoteric philosophy come to a similar conclusion that there exists a unitary ground, a single binding force that holds the elements of any structure (micro or macro) together and keeps them in existence as a whole, and that in itself this unified force is of a transcendental character in relation to the world, and that it works as an expression of the universal law. The workings of these structures, "seen" and "unseen," represent multiple realities (e.g., "quanta," "hadrons," "quarks," etc.), which show evidence of a unified force behind them—presupposition of the existence of ultimate reality.

The above perspectives seem to emphasize the general orientation of the world (at the levels of obvious and "hidden" realities) toward a unity, or "wholeness"; and self seems to follow the same path—strive for the unity of its vacillating states. The above perspectives represent both possibilities and dilemmas for personal views on the nature of reality and self. One may choose to reject some and accept others, or embrace them all as one broad way to look at the world and our place in it.

Implications for Education. Conclusions

Given that there is a sense of "enduring self" based on the modal-ontological status of subjectivity and other supportive arguments, I would like to highlight the following:

(1) The nature of adult can be understood as "the whole person": a unity of "subjectivity" and "individuality," the nature that is "more intrinsic and essential as who I really am and what I really do, as distinct from what I only appear to be and the ways in which I am seen by others" (Stanage, 1987, p. 271). The concept of "intrinsic self" emphasizes the unity of both internal and external realms of being, the unity of *uni*versality and *multi*plicity (Schelling), "reciprocal hospitality" (Schleiermacher), "transcendental unity of apperception" (Kant), or *spiritual nuptials* (esotericism).

(2) The nature of adult education can be looked at as an expression of the *whole life* of an adult person. True self-knowledge, which I see as resulting from a self-evolutionary process has the power to resolve the old individual-society dilemma, and adult education may assist individual learners in this process.

The above assumptions can find support in early and contemporary adult education writers.

Since the 1920s, personal growth perspective has been part of mainstream thought in adult education. In the early adult education movement, the objective of personal growth was the production of "the whole person" (Jacks, 1936, p. 4). To Lindeman, the purpose of adult education was "to put meaning into the whole life" (Lindeman, 1926, p. 6). One of the major purposes of adult education is to assist learners to grow and to attain a richer and fuller life in their own terms. Lindeman (1926) emphasized the need of adult learners for self-expression. He claimed that only those selves that have been self-discovered could get realized and expressed. Humans seem to be purposive beings, and "mission may lie at the heart of the purposes of adult education" (Kroth, Boverie, 2000, p. 145).

Inherent in the American spirit is a desire for self-improvement. Relevant to this purpose is the concept of need. My appeal to speculative philosophy and esotericism in this research is supported by the writers who see the basic need of adult education in creating the balance between cognitive, analytical, intellectual ways of knowing and the contemplative approach, which both may have relevance to a more comprehensive understanding of the adult as a learner. Adult educators "might well consider ways to cultivate, both in themselves and in learners, cognitive, contemplative, and other ways of knowing" (Boucouvalas, Krupp, 1989, p. 188).

Education, in my mind, stands for the metaphor of personal growth, development, and transformation, as one navigates the paths of learning about oneself and the world. I also believe that changes in adult learners' states of consciousness may signify their self-evolution. These changes may be understood as "deliberate liberative actions of consciousing and responsible persons whereby they become transformed and empowered with vital motives for acting" (Stanage, 1987, p. 272).

As I examine the course of my own life with its needs to realize all of my potentialities, I wonder what my motivations, the resources and sources of my own growth and transformation are. As I navigate the paths of my self-knowledge, I encounter the possibilities and dilemmas of my experiences. We are often required to reflect upon ourselves and our lives in immediate societies. We try to develop critical thinking and learn to see ourselves as co-creators of culture. We will probably continue to struggle over "whether our role should be to service practical needs for training, credentialing, and improving skills or to support our noble, traditional mission, the liberation of the human mind and the growth of the student" (Hill, 1998, p. 64).

I do not intend to change other persons' ways of thinking. I cannot possibly have such power. Yet I believe in personal and collective power of beings, the power that liberates and moves to action. I also believe in the power of education and its traditional mission to liberate the mind and to initiate the growth of the student. I believe in teaching and learning as contributing to the transformation of both a person and of culture. And I believe in the possibility for finding missing links in a whole. It might be an ideal, an ideal worthy of ultimate pursuit.

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